

Yesterday, I participated in a House Budget Committee hearing with Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke on the state of our nation's economy.

After I left the hearing, Rep. Todd Akin (R-Mo.) referenced my opening statement and twisted my words into something I did not say or imply. Later I watched Mr. Akin's misstatement prominently displayed on his Congressional website.

"The comment was made earlier, which I thought was an amazing quotation from Ms. McCollum, the budget deficit is not a spending problem," said Mr. Akin. He continued, "I found that amazing, because it seems like to me it sure is a big spending problem. So we're just on different planets, I suppose."

Mr. Akin can tell us what planet he lives on, but I live in the real world. I take pride in conducting myself with respect and civility with my colleagues. One would hope that Mr. Akin's misrepresentation of my comments will not reflect the manner in which the House Budget Committee's members conduct themselves in the future.

What I said in the Budget Committee hearing was the following: "Today, we focused on spending quite a bit as some of the questions have come through. And, in fact, I'm going to paraphrase a popular tea party slogan that goes something like this, 'The federal government doesn't have a revenue problem; it has a spending problem.' Chairman Bernanke, it seems clear to me that the deficit is not just a spending problem."

Nowhere in my statement did I say the "budget deficit is not a spending problem."

Mr. Akin's misstatement does provide an opportunity for a short history lesson for all the new Tea Party Members in Congress. Mr. Akin and I both entered Congress in 2001. At that time, there was a projected ten year budget surplus of \$5.6 trillion. Mr. Akin's party - the Republican Party (before the addition of the Tea Party) - controlled the House of Representatives and the White House. But the real and projected surpluses quickly vanished with President George W. Bush and Mr. Akin in office. The 2001 and 2003 Bush tax cuts - which I voted against and Mr. Akin voted for - contributed to the growth of the federal deficit by the trillions. The war in Iraq - which I opposed and Mr. Akin voted for - has added over one trillion dollars to the national debt.

In 2008, with the U.S. economy in danger of collapse, I voted for the Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP). I made the tough decision to spend \$700 billion to prevent an economic meltdown. Interestingly, a February 9, 2011 editorial headline in USA Today, reads "Surprise! The hated bank bailout is about to turn a profit." My vote for TARP helped to save our economy and soon will be returning a profit to the U.S. Treasury.

In December 2010, Congress voted to extend the Bush tax cuts, which will expand our nation's debt. This package contained extra tax cuts for millionaires and billionaires, along with billions of deficit exploding special tax breaks for NASCAR racetrack owners, Caribbean rum manufacturers, and other special interests. Again, I voted against that fiscally irresponsible legislation, while Mr. Akin voted to add another \$858 billion to the deficit.

Members of Congress make different choices on policy. My record and Mr. Akin's record are obvious examples of this. Mr. Akin is very concerned about spending but at the same time he has taken votes that add trillions of dollars to the national debt. That's a fact.

Having opposed reckless tax cuts and the Iraq War, I have a different record. I strongly support making smart investments here at home that keep America's families, communities, and businesses prosperous. I also believe we need to pay for the investments we make.

Congress will never be able to get our nation's fiscal house in order if we cannot be honest with the facts. This may be a good place for us to start.

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